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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001049

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [WI](#) [SOFA](#)

SUBJECT: SENHADJI POSITIVELY ASSESSES INAUGURAL JOINT  
MILITARY DIALOGUE

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman; reasons 1.4 (B)(D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Over May 24 lunch with Ambassador, MOD Secretary General Senhadji expressed great satisfaction with his Washington visit and the inaugural session of the Joint Military Dialogue. He also indicated Algeria would approve a SOFA for the June Flintlock exercises; reaffirmed Algerian interest in concluding a long-term SOFA agreement; and said Armed Forces Chief Gait-Salah's visit to Russia was routine and would not produce anything "dramatic" (i.e., a MIG deal), a point explicitly confirmed by Presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir in a subsequent conversation. On the lack of a response on a Blue Lantern request, Senhadji indicated he had not known the contract in question (concerning a purchase from a South African firm) contained a Blue Lantern provision and asked for the documentation, leaving the impression they would respond if their contractual obligation was documented. On C-130H gunships, Senhadji reaffirmed Algeria's preference for the purchase of new gunships, as opposed to converting existing C-130s. On terrorism statistics, he acknowledged a considerable discrepancy between the numbers presented at the JMD and public statements by GOA officials. He explained that President Bouteflika always referred to the number of "terrorist victims" rather than the number of "dead" -- a much broader concept since virtually all Algerian families were touched by terrorism one way or another. Regarding the Western Sahara issue, Senhadji saw an autonomy outcome as the only real solution and regretted that Morocco had rejected the Baker Plan, since it had provided a way to reach that goal while honoring the self-determination principle. (End Summary)

SENHADJI PLEASED WITH JMD, HIGH-LEVEL RECEPTION

2. (C) Ambassador and DATT lunched with MOD Secretary General MG Senhadji May 23 at his invitation to review the results of the Joint Military Dialogue. Ambassador congratulated Senhadji on his Washington visit, noting it seemed to have achieved everything we set out to achieve -- the creation of a mechanism for regular, high-level consultations to guide and facilitate our expanding military cooperation, a better understanding of the Algerian military's commitment to modernization and professionalization, and a strong reaffirmation of our commitment to expanded counterterrorism cooperation. Senhadji said he was extremely pleased with the visit and with his many meetings and appreciative that Secretary Rumsfeld had received him so warmly.

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ALGERIA WILL APPROVE EXERCISE SOFA

3. (C) Ambassador said that he had presented a demarche to Foreign Minister Bedjaoui May 21 regarding a SOFA to cover Exercise Flintlock 2005. The Minister had said the Ministry would consider the proposed exchange of notes on an exercise SOFA "positively." Ambassador thanked Senhadji for having spoken to Bedjaoui about the SOFA issue following his return from the JMD discussions. Senhadji reiterated his strong support for a long-term SOFA and said the Algerian government would certainly sign an agreement covering the Flintlock exercise, since preparations for the exercise were so far along, the exercise was less than two weeks away, and it was important for developing our cooperation.

ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF VISIT TO MOSCOW

4. (C) Ambassador asked about Armed Forces Chief Gait-Salah's May 22-26 visit to Moscow. Asked if the visit would produce anything dramatic or of interest, Senhadji said the visit was a routine exchange, in response to an invitation from the Russian Ministry of Defense. That said, Algeria still did a lot of business with the Russians because so much of their equipment was ex-Soviet and they needed spare parts. The current visit involved day-to-day business between the two militaries, he said, leaving the strong impression that no deal on MIGs was imminent, as has been rumored in the local press. In a separate May 24 conversation, Presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir also confirmed to Ambassador that the visit

was routine. He explicitly stated the visit would not/not produce a deal on MIGs, noting that Gait-Salah was not empowered to make any such decision.

#### BLUE LANTERN END-USE MONITORING

15. Ambassador recalled that last February he had raised with Senhadji our concerns about the lack of an Algerian response to a Blue Lantern request, explaining that the failure to respond could complicate future sales. DATT noted that he had also sent a letter to the Directorate of Exterior Relations and Cooperation (DREC) over a month ago and had not received a response. The two Blue Lantern cases in question involved the sale of American-made equipment to the Algerians through a South African firm. Senhadji initially responded that the issue was between the U.S. and the South African firm and that Algeria had already given end-use assurances to the South African firm. It should not have to provide two such assurances, he said. DATT helpfully clarified that when the Algerians signed the contract, they agreed to the Blue Lantern provisions and thus had an obligation to respond to our request. Upon learning this, Senhadji asked DATT to provide copies of the appropriate documentation to his executive assistant (who was present at the lunch). DATT will provide documents as soon as possible.

#### C-130s GUNSHIPS -- NEW OR MODIFIED?

16. (C) Ambassador and DATT noted that during the Joint Military Dialogue the previous week, the subcommittee on security assistance addressed the issue of C-130 gunships, which the Algerians have expressed an interest in acquiring. According to unofficial minutes prepared by a EUCOM representative, the Algerians stated that they wanted to convert one or two of their current C-130s rather than purchase a new gunship. Senhadji expressed surprise at hearing this, saying Algeria wanted to purchase new gunships. DATT subsequently spoke with our Security Assistance Officer who had participated in the subcommittee session. The latter clarified that the Algerian members of the subcommittee did state that such a conversion was a viable alternative, given that there were no more C-130H models available for purchase and that on their return to Algeria they would examine the conversion option. Their original position, however, was that Algeria wanted to purchase additional aircraft. DATT will ensure that the position of the Algerian military is clarified with EUCOM and DSCA.

#### TERRORISM CASUALTY STATISTICS

17. (C) Ambassador said he had been struck by the Algerians' JMD briefing on the numbers killed in terrorism incidents and the number of remaining armed terrorists. The total numbers killed, in particular, were far lower than the 100,000-150,000 figures mentioned in various statements by senior Algerian officials. Senhadji insisted that the figures presented (10,700 civilians, 6,000 military, and 16,400 terrorists killed; 14,963 civilians, 10,000 military wounded, 34,800 terrorists arrested, 7,000 terrorists surrendered) were the real figures. The other figures used by political officials had been "political figures." Explaining part of the discrepancy, he said that in citing figures, President Bouteflika always referred to the number of "victims," not the number of "dead." Obviously, the "victims" category was a much broader concept that literally would include all Algerians, since virtually every family in the country was touched by terrorism, one way or another.

18. (C) In this context, Senhadji recalled his recent conversation with Deputy NSC Adviser Abrams, who had asked if terrorism could ever take hold again in Algeria. He had unhesitatingly replied that it could not. The people, he explained, had been fooled once, but they were not stupid and now understood that terrorism had been directed against them. He recounted how in the early 1990s, the people accepted the Islamic terrorists' line that burning schools, police stations, post offices, and the like was warranted because they had been told it was the religiously correct thing to do. But they changed their views about the terrorists when the actions of these groups began to touch them personally, with the raping of their wives and daughters. This, along with the arming of local militia and patriotic groups, had been the real turning point in the war against terrorism inside Algeria. The decision to arm local groups, he recalled, had been very difficult but, once taken, it quickly became apparent it was the right thing to do because it reinforced the public's willingness to confront the terrorists.

#### WESTERN SAHARA

19. (C) Senhadji stressed that the stability of Morocco and

the stability of the throne were important to regional stability and to Algeria's national interests. He clearly pointed to autonomy as the solution to the Western Sahara issue, noting with regret Morocco's rejection of the Baker Plan, whose provisions for a 5-year period of autonomy could have been managed so as to produce the outcome Morocco needed (i.e., sovereignty over the Western Sahara). He also regretted that the Western Sahara had been such a divisive issue for Morocco and Algeria because on almost all other counts -- ethnicity, language, culture, religion -- both shared much in common. He volunteered that the Western Sahara issue was one on which all Moroccans felt strongly. By contrast, Algerians did not focus on the Western Sahara very much or nearly so strongly. Nonetheless, Algeria's position supporting self-determination had remained constant over the years in supporting the Sahrawi right of self-determination. Algeria could not deny to the Sahrawis what Algeria had claimed for itself in the struggle against the French.

10. (C) Ambassador said his personal analysis was that since integration was unacceptable to the Sahrawis and independence was unacceptable to the Moroccans, that left the autonomy option as the only viable outcome where there was some common ground. Accordingly, this is what everyone should be working to achieve while honoring the principle of self-determination. The U.S. position was that the principle of self-determination needed to be respected and that working for improved Moroccan-Algerian relations was the best way to proceed, since it would help create a regional climate more conducive to settlement of the Western Sahara issue. Ambassador added that he did not see how an independent state outcome would serve Algerian national interests, since such a state inevitably would be weak, have porous borders, invite outside influence, and provide a haven for terrorists like the Sahel. Senhadji, having just commented that the principal strategic threats to Algeria come from the south, did not respond directly but clearly took the point.

ERDMAN